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## **Farm Tourism**

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**Farm Tourism: Lifestyle Entrepreneurship and Private Hospitality**

*Paper prepared for the 20th Nordic Symposium in Tourism and Hospitality Research, Rovaniemi September 2011*

**Farm Tourism:  
Lifestyle Entrepreneurship and Private Hospitality**

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**FarmTourism:  
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*Abstract submitted to the Nordic Symposium in Tourism and Hospitality Research*

*Bodil Stilling Blichfeldt, Niels Ch. Nielsen, Kathrine Nissen & Flemming Just*

**Abstract**

*This paper draws on a study of one specific type of small tourism enterprises (i.e. farm tourism enterprises) and argues that these enterprises differ from other enterprises in relation to a series of issues other than merely size. The analysis shows that enterprises such as these are characterized by blurriness of boundaries between 'home spheres' and work situations as well as by a unique blend of commercial and private hospitality. Furthermore, the study shows that 'social' motivations and non-monetary benefits gained through host-guest interactions are of great importance to the hosts. In particular, our study suggests that it is problematic to treat farm tourism enterprises as if they have much in common with both larger corporations and other types of SMTEs. Farm tourism enterprises seem to differ significantly from other enterprises as the hosts are not in the tourism business because it is particularly profitable but because of more 'social motivations' (such as the sharing of the rural experience with outsiders, to socialize and meet new people and to re-construct self-perceptions) and the paper points to implications for future research.*

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### **Introduction**

The tourism industry is characterized by the existence of many small and medium-sized enterprises (Blichfeldt, 2009; Buhalis & Cooper, 1998; Getz & Carlsen, Getz & Petersen, 2005; Hjalager, 2002; Jacob et al, 2003; Morrison et al, 1999; Orfil-Sintes & Mattson, 2007; Shaw & Williams, 1990) and many of these enterprises might even qualify as what Bolin and Greenwood (2003) label 'micro businesses'; i.e. business with less than four employees. As a result, the tourism industry generally, and in rural areas particularly, is comprised of a series of micro-businesses that are run by the manager-owners (sometimes with the help of a few employees); businesses that *per se* differ tremendously from larger enterprises in regard to, for example, motivation for start-up, growth objectives, strategies and resources. Albeit these small and medium-sized enterprises may have little in common with larger corporations, academia has tended to treat such enterprises as if they resemble larger counterparts to such an extent that the same theoretical frameworks are used in both contexts. However, drawing on an investigation of one specific type of small tourism enterprises, this paper suggests that these small enterprises differ from other enterprises in relation to a series of issues other than merely size; thus suggesting that if we wish to understand these enterprises we need to develop theories that specifically deal with the characteristics and challenges of these enterprises. The specific micro tourism enterprises that are investigated in the study accounted for in this paper are farm tourism enterprises. Apart from the fact that farm tourism enterprises often are micro businesses, most of these enterprises also qualify as family businesses (e.g. Andersson et al, 2002; Gasson & Errington, 1993; Getz & Carlsen, 2000), thus suggesting that a series of unique characteristics may set these enterprises aside from other small tourism businesses. For example, the analysis shows that these 'family farm' enterprises are characterized by blurriness of boundaries between 'home spheres' and work situations as well as by a unique blend of commercial and private hospitality (as described by Andersson Cederholm, 2007), thus suggesting that these enterprises cannot, and should not, be analyzed as if they are similar to other tourism organizations.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Apart from the fact that the tourism industry is comprised of a few large corporations and a welter of SMTEs, the tourism sector is also special as it is a particularly fertile environment for lifestyle entrepreneurship (Ataljevic & Doorne, 2001). For example, Stallinbrass (1990), Morrison et al (1999) as well as Ioannides and Petersen (2003) found that many small and medium-sized tourism enterprises are run by lifestyle entrepreneurs, the key motivations of whom relate far more to self-employment as a way of living than to economic motives. Accordingly, the lifestyle entrepreneur may pursue growth to a lesser extent than other entrepreneurs as the lifestyle entrepreneur is predominantly concerned with whether the entrepreneurial venture enables him/her to

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make a ‘decent’ living on the basis of the micro business whereas the lifestyle entrepreneur may not wish for the venture to grow to such an extent that he/she has to hire staff in order to run the business. Furthermore, small tourism enterprises may qualify as no more than an *additional* source of income (Ioannides & Petersen, 2003). This seems to particularly be the case in relation to farm tourism, as farming mostly continuous to be the key source of income after the farmers start to engage in farm tourism whereas the engagement in farm tourism is a means for the entrepreneurs to be(come) self-employed instead of seeking (or continuing) off-farm employment. This finding is supported by the works of Brandth and Haugen (2007). If Brandth and Haugen’s (2007) findings generalize beyond their rather small sample, then farm tourism ventures cannot be studied through the ‘traditional’ organizational lenses, according to which growth and profit are key motivational drivers. On the contrary, if key considerations are (a) to ensure that enough time is available for work relating to the primary source of income (i.e. farming) and (b) to ensure that the venture stays at a size that ensures that the manager-owners do not need to hire staff to run the venture, then we need to develop theory that takes into account the fact that the owners of these ventures might *not* be especially (or at all) interested in pursuing growth.

Smaller tourism enterprises in rural areas are often family businesses (Getz & Carlsen, 2005), in which the spouses (and possibly other family members) not only live, but also work, together. This seems to especially be the case in relation to farm tourism as the family usually (although not always) lives at the farm as well as works with tourists at the premises. This concords with traditional definitions of farm tourism, according to which the term farm tourism covers commercial tourism enterprises on working farms (e.g. Busby & Rendle, 2000; Clarke 1996; Frater 1983). Furthermore, farm tourism seems to be a fertile environment for the existence of family businesses, in which the spouses work together. For example, Ollenburg and Buckley (2007) argue that most farm tourism businesses are family businesses on family farms. As another example, in their study of family farm tourism, Brandth and Haugen (2007:5) argue that although one of the spouses might be the one initiating the tourism enterprises, both start up and day-to-day operation of the new enterprise are usually the responsibility of both spouses as “it takes two to operate this kind of business”. Furthermore, as opposed to traditional farming, farm tourism is characterized by the fact that the customers (or guests) stay at the premises, consequently challenging traditional separations between front and back stage work as well as between ‘servicescapes’ and domestic spheres. This means that the traditional division between ‘work space’ and ‘domestic space’ might be especially blurred in relation to farm tourism ventures and thus, issues such as how to organize service encounters and how to cope with emotional labor become something that the spouses have to deal with in a setting that is both devoted to leisure and work. Lynch (2005) touches upon this issue when he argues that farm tourism is a form of homestay tourism. Lynch (2005:528) defines ‘homestay’ as “a specialist term referring to types of accommodation where tourists or guests pay to stay in private homes, where

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interaction takes place with a host and/or family usually living upon the premises, and with whom public place is, to a degree, shared”. Accordingly, farms open to tourists become enterprises that “borrow from both private and commercial domains” (Lynch, 2005:541) and henceforward, a key characteristic of these enterprises is that the product core is the provision of commercial hospitality in a private home.

Although farming and tourism, at the surface, are seemingly entirely different areas of business, to start up a tourism enterprise may not be too difficult for families in rural areas as several authors (e.g. Canoves et al, 2004; Hall and Rusher, 2004; Hogh, 2001; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007; Pearce, 1990) emphasize that these families – irrespective of income – have a strong tradition of hospitality. As such, the provision of hospitality to strangers might be a personal trait of farm families – regardless of whether this trait relates to private hospitality or whether it translates into commercial hospitality in the form of farm tourism. Unfortunately, little is known about both the actual hospitality provided by farm tourism enterprises and reasons for providing such hospitality.

As emphasized in this section, farm tourism enterprises seem to be a rather unique type of small tourism enterprises due to the characteristics introduced above:

- Boundaries between domestic life and service-scapes may be blurred
- Tourism is often a secondary source of income
- The two lines of occupation (i.e. farming and tourism) take place on the same premises
- Spouses (and potentially other family members) often work together

The aim of this paper is to contribute with knowledge on this, perhaps, rather unique type of small tourism enterprises – as enacted by the manager-owners. In particular, the paper aims to answer the over-arching question whether these enterprises differ from other SMTEs to such an extent that we need to develop theories pertaining to these niche enterprises or whether they resemble other SMTEs to such an extent that extant theory qualifies as an appropriate conceptual basis. Obviously, the best way to address this question is to make a full-scale survey of farm tourism enterprises. However, as the characteristics listed above have not been subject to much research, this paper draws on a rather exploratory study in which we particularly emphasize the manager-owners perceptions and attitudes.

A major limitation of the study is that it only draws on data from a series of Danish farm tourism enterprises. We do acknowledge that farm tourism may vary extensively across regional, national and cultural

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settings and thus, the study accounted for in this paper does not, per se, provide much information of value pertaining to farm tourism at, for example, ranches in the US, sheep farms in New Zealand or cattle stations in Australia. An important element of the study was to investigate how the manager-owners of farm tourism enterprises enact the needs and wants of their guests. However, the importance ascribed to such enactment does not related to a wish to uncover the demand-side of farm tourism. Instead, drawing on Levitt's (1960) lines of reasoning, this topic is investigated in order to unfold what 'kind of business' the manager-owners find that they are in and especially to uncover whether they define themselves predominantly as farmers; providers of accommodation; 'ambassadors' and educational guides of farm life; or as tourism enterprises providing 'experience packages' to their guests.

**Methodology**

This paper is based on a study carried out at the Danish Centre for Rural Research. The study was commissioned by the Danish Food Industry Agency (FødevareErhverv) and spurred by a request for assessment of the possibilities for innovation in rural tourism (Nielsen et al, 2010). The starting point for the study was the assumption that there are a number of economic, logistic and planning-related barriers for those, who want to develop tourism products in the Danish countryside, outside traditional tourism areas. A review and comparison of existing statistics for tourism and agriculture in Denmark showed that currently, farm-based tourism is of little importance for tourism turnover, for employment in the agricultural sector and for the economy of the individual farm. Of around 45,000 full- and part-time farms in Denmark in 2007, only around 1 % was engaged in some form of tourism activity, and according to official statistics, they contributed around 40m DKK (5.4m EUR) to the tourism sector turnover. However, as farm tourism is emphasized as one of the ways, in which innovation and growth might be pursued in rural areas, an investigation of this niche was conducted.

Empirically, the study is comprised of (a) interviews with key persons within rural tourism in Denmark; (b) interviews with key informants at the municipal level; and (c) an on-line survey uncovering the characteristics, attitudes and experiences of rural tourism hosts. Furthermore, a series of 10 interviews with hosts were carried out in rural parts of the four Danish regions, where agriculture is of some importance. Throughout the study, examples of good and innovative practices have been collected and described, Nielsen et al (2011). In table 1, an overview of the different types of rural tourism products marketed by the sample is offered. Furthermore, in table 2 an overview of key characteristics of the interviewees is offered.

BF	Farm Holidays
FL	Rural/country holidays, apartments
BB	Bed and Breakfast

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GT	can host larger groups (parties, celebrations)
KG	Courses and meetings
BC	Farm Camping
GB	Farm Shop
BL	Visitor Farm

**Table 1** Types of rural tourism products as offered on the web site of the Danish Association for Rural Tourism [www.bondegaardsferie.dk](http://www.bondegaardsferie.dk) (several offers possible for each provider)

Host #	farm/property type	product(s)	Size # beds (as)	Start year, development
1	active farm, small	BF, FL	6 (8)	2008 *
2	active farm	BF, BB, GB, BL,	38 (50)	1993, refurbished stable
3	retired from farming (ding)	FL, BC	15 (17)	2001, refurbished extra house on rty
4	active farm	BF, FL	20	ca. 2000, spare apartment + urbished
5	active farm	BF, FL, BB, GB,	14 (17)	2002, built extra apartment, farm tourism
6	country house, school	FL, BB, GT	38	2002, gradual expansion
7	former farm house	FL, BB, GT	16	ca. 2000 **
8	country house, rm	FL (horse	4 (8)	1995, apartment available for ut
9	Manor house	BB, FL	14	2009, saw potential for B&B in
10	former farm	FL, BB, GT, KG	44	1986, gradual expansion

**Table 2** Main characteristics of the 10 hosts interviewees. For definitions of products offered, see Table 1. \* House that was also rented out earlier, but as holiday apartment/house after renovation. \*\* Current owner took over existing B&B from parents-in-law.

## **Analysis**

According to the interviewees, the tourists that stay at the farms use the facilities in very different ways. Some guests simply enact the farm as an affordable accommodation and moreover, not all of these guests are tourists. Apart from tourists, the group of ‘accommodation only’ guests primarily consists of foreign workers, who simply need somewhere to sleep, shower and perhaps eat while they are doing their job in a country other than their own. Some tourists use the farm in much the same way as the workers, as the farm is seen as accommodation and as the basis for a series of daytrips to various sites and attractions (and especially amusement parks etc.) in the area. These tourists show no interest in the farm itself; nor in the manager-owners daily lives. Instead, they simply define the product as one of (rather cheap) accommodation. However, many guests come and stay at the farm specifically because it is a farm and because it allows for them to gain access



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to contemporary farm life. Furthermore, across all types of visitors, lengths of stays vary considerably: Stretching from the cycling or car tourists that only need a place to stay for a single night over families with dependent children that spend two weeks experiencing farm life (mostly spicing the experience up with some daytrips to nearby natural or man-made attractions) to the skilled workers that stay for a couple of months (albeit possibly going home some weekends).

In this paper we focus on those tourists that take an interest in, and expect to be invited into, everyday life at the farm. Nonetheless, we do acknowledge the importance of the other guests in order to make farm tourism worthwhile, or, as host 4 phrased it:

*"Tourism alone couldn't hold up the venture"*

Drawing on the interviewees' lines of reasoning and definitions-in-use of their product offers, we thus acknowledge that farm tourism is an activity that encompasses a series of host-guests relations that have little to do with tourism; and nothing to do with *farm* tourism. The interviewees are very aware of the differences between the different types of guests they host and how these differences translate into different needs and wants across guests. Furthermore, the interviewees are particularly aware of the fact that some guests come to experience life at the farm and that access to contemporary farm life acts as the key travel motivation of these guests, or, as host 4 argues:

*"Some guests, they want to visit the country side"*

Although interviewees acknowledge, and seek to cater to, the different needs of the various groups of guests (stretching from those who simply eat and shower at the farm to those that come to experience farm life), they also have clear ideas as to which guests they prefer. For example, one of the interviewees (host 5) argued as follows:

*"Those guests, who are just in and out the door, they are not interested in seeing what happens here. But that's perfectly okay, we're not to tell people what to do. But we prefer the other guests, we chat with them"*

Due to the fact that the interviewees prefer the guests that take a special interest in visiting a farm, in the following accounts for both motivation of guests and hosts, we focus on host-guest encounters with guests that come to the farms in order to experience farm life. This analysis is three-fold as we first focus on the guests'

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first-order travel motivations, thereafter we emphasize the guests' more subtle motives and lastly, we focus on the owners motivations for engaging with the guests. It ought to be mentioned that in the two sections that investigate the guests' motivations, we draw on the manager-owners accounts hereof and *not* on a guest perspective. As mentioned previously, this is a deliberate choice that relates to the fact that we are not interested in the 'objective' truth above the guests' motives. Instead, in this piece of research, we are interested in unfolding the manager-owners enactment of guests' reasons to visit as it is these enacted motives that translate into behavior on the hosts' behalves.

**Why Farm Tourists Visit – Kids Stroking Kittens and Kids**

It is no surprise that tourists come to the farm to experience farm life, or, as host 1 put it:

*"... people living in a fourth floor apartment, coming here and experiencing birds singing and experiencing the cattle in the pasture, ... I mean, as an example, the kids haven't even seen a cow before they come here"*

The quote above reflects perceptions of travel motivations across all interviewees and thus, all interviewees argue that farm tourists come to experience that, which they do not have access to in everyday lives – whether it is the sound of birds singing or the view of cattle in the pasture. Furthermore, the manager-owners all argue that farm tourists come not only to see farm life from a distance, but that they come in order to become part of this life and to experience it with all of their senses. As such, farm tourists are not in the business of 'sightseeing' or 'gazing' (Urry, 1990), but want to immerse into the farm life situation (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; 1999). Furthermore, the manager-owners rather explicitly relate to the expectations of the farm tourists. For example, host 8 relates to this issue as follows:

*"And they can expect to, well, basically, to walk around and to use the grounds all they want to"*

Due to the interviewees' affirmation that they know what the tourists want, this knowledge guides host behavior in ways as exemplified below (by hosts 3, 4, 5 and 6):

*"We tell them, when they visit: You are our guest, you can go everywhere you want to. They can stroll around the park, they can use the back premises and they can play football and they can go down the meadow and to the waterfront, they can go fishing there or whatever they want to"*

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*"Well, they can expect that they are staying somewhere where they are allowed to spend time with the animals. And to stroll along [...] But we only have dairy cattle and calves. But they can go and spend time with them [...] And they can join in when we feed the animals and they want to, the kids, they also like to tag along when we use the tractor. They have a cozy time"*

*"We have a working farm that we run every day, so every day there's a chance to milk the cows, take care of the calves and get a ride on the tractor. We have a horse and we offer riding and we have a playground in the garden and we have an activity room, if they want to play inside – and then all the things that go on at a farm. I would say that most of the people that come, they come because they wish for their kids to partake in the farming activities. Many of our guests take part in the milking of the cows, feeding the calves and when the cows calve. The cows' calving, that's a huge experience to them. And all kids want to get a ride on the tractor; and a lot of the dads, too. [...] And this year, we make our own icecream. That's something new. We usually do it once a week and the guests are invited to take part in that, so they can see how we turn the milk into icecream. And usually, once a week we also have a bonfire – with twistbread or pancakes"*

*"They can expect to experience lots of animals and to experience this farm idyll, they can hang out at the porch, they can use the garden and the parents with dependent children, the kids love to be around the kittens and the tiny chicks. And we have sheep and goats and goat kids. But the kids simply love that and when the kids are happy, then the parents enjoy themselves. [...] So the guests get a bit more than they expected"*

As exemplified by the quotes above, all of the farm tourism enterprises included in our study offer a series of services and experiences that especially cater to the needs of families with dependent children. Furthermore, the core service on offer is the facilitation of children-animal encounters and interaction. Accordingly, the focal offer is heavily embedded in traditional farming endeavors (i.e. driving a tractor and taking care of farm animals); albeit there is a tendency for this offer to relate to more nostalgic versions of farm life than to modern, industrial farming practices.

#### **Why Farm Tourists also Visit – Socializing with a Real-Life Farmer**

The core services provided by the farm tourism enterprises listed above could, potentially, also be produced and consumed in other contexts than that of farm tourism. For example, children-animal encounters could equally well take place in the context of a pet zoo. However, farm tourism enterprises also provide a series of services and experiences that are embedded in the unique characteristics of these enterprises to such an extent that it would be difficult (impossible?) to produce these experiences and services in alternate contexts.

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These unique experiences relate to the farmers themselves and their role as ‘gatekeepers’ that invite tourists into a ‘real life farm experience’. Interviewees touch upon this issue in ways such as the following (hosts 2 and 4):

*”Our experience is that the guests appreciate that it is us that are here; that they get a warm welcome and that it is us that welcome them, that they can come to us with questions. And then they expect a really nice vacation in close rapport with us*

*”The tourists expect that it is us that are here. I mean, we could hire some staff and withdraw a bit ourselves – taking every second weekend off or take time off during the holidays, but I don’t think that would work out right. It has to be us that are here, so that the tourists get the feel that they visit **us**, not just some hired hands”*

*”We do not want to develop this thing into something bigger and we do absolutely not want it to develop beyond what we can take care of ourselves. It’s not something that other people can do for you. Well, you can easily find someone who wants to do it, that’s not the problem ... It’s more the thing that no one else can do it as good as yourself. [...]If it gets big then it’s not farm tourism anymore, then it turns into a hotel operation and we don’t want to do that. No, it has to be something that we can do ourselves”*

Lynch (2005) argues that ”the host is central to the product experience in commercial homes” and successful stays (from a guest perspective) thus depend upon the quality of host-guest interactions. This includes interactions with both the hosts and the commercial home setting as a reflection of the host’s self. As exemplified by the quotes above, the farm tourism hosts in our study enact themselves as critical to tourist experiences, thus corroborating Lynch’s (2005) argumentation. Furthermore, the interviewees argue that the reason why they are central to tourist experiences is that they act as ‘guarantees’ of authenticity – or as two interviewees (hosts 6 and 7) phrase it:

*”It’s not, like, staged, it’s not as if people have to pay for things no matter where they go. It’s not like that here, not at all, it’s kind of different; we have very few things that people have to pay for”*

*”People who’ve been here and who have experience the atmosphere and the service and that warm greeting and the authenticity; that you eat our own produce at breakfast and so, that’s something that people really like. That we focus on the things that are, ... I mean, there’s so much pretence in other parts of life, but around here, you kind of know what you eat, what you get, and people are, like, what they say they are. I think it*

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*is that thing about being almost a member of the family, like with that warm welcome, compared to staying at a hotel, right? I think that's what guests come here – and come again – to experience”*

Although the issue that manager-owners *themselves* may qualify as ‘key attractions’ is under-researched, other studies (e.g. Blichfeldt, 2009) point to similar findings. This issue seems to make farm tourism enterprises fundamentally different from other tourism organizations and particularly, it seems to qualify as a reason why these enterprises rarely move beyond being micro businesses; thus questioning the relevance of traditional, growth-oriented literature.

**Why Hosts Host – More than Matters of Additional Income**

Contradictory to conventional wisdom that emphasizes farm tourism as a source of additional (and critical) *income*, our interviewees argue that income is *not* the only reason why they engage in farm tourism. For example, interviewees argue as follows in regard to why they engage in farm tourism:

*”I’d like to emphasize that there’s not much gained by it [...] Actually, I’m not in it for the sake of the money. I like it that the house is put to use and well, I don’t do it for gregarious reasons either [...] But as a host I think it’s really important that you, well, some people really like to chatter. That’s actually why there’s weeds all over my garden, because people come here and they have the time for it, so they want to learn about the area, right? And they want to know about this and that and this and then you chatter and don’t get much done, I think that’s part of the reason”*

*”People differ, but the majority of them – my guess is around 90 percent of them – have been very, very satisfied staying here. That makes us happy, that’s the best there is. We’re happy about that”*

*”This is not something you should do in order to become wealthy, we do it because we like it. And then maybe ends meet, but it’s like everything else; you should be dedicated to it and you have to like to meet, be with and talk with, people”*

Apart from more economic motivations to engage in farm tourism, McGehee and Kim (2004) also found that substantive motivations in the form of ‘it’s a hobby of ours’ and ‘companionship with guests and visitors’ were crucial for farmers, who engaged in farm tourism. In the same vein, concluding on her case-study of a SMTE, Blichfeldt (2009:426) argued that, for the manager-owners in her study, “hospitality and the opportunity to meet people were key drivers from the very start [of start-up of the enterprise]” and that the roles

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of the host and the guest in this specific SMTE context varied significantly from those in traditional commercial hospitality settings. In accordance with both McGehee and Kim (2004) and Blichfeldt (2009), the farm tourism interviewees argue that interpersonal relations act as a key reason to engage in farm tourism and thus, our study indicates that the importance of ‘softer’ motifs might be under-estimated by extant research.

As mentioned in the introductory part of the analysis section, the interviewees were aware of the facts that the motivation of guests varied considerably and that only some guests took an interest in the ‘farming’ element of their product. In the quote below, host 7 touches upon this issue while also explicating the benefits (beyond monetary benefits) that he encounters when he interacts with the tourists:

*”If the guests express wishes to go pat the lambs or something, we’d never say no. But it’s not like we prepare the ground for that, we don’t expect people to do those things while they are here, it’s nothing like that. [...] It’s more like, if for example people visit during Easter, then the sheep give birth, because that’s what happens around here at that point in time [...] And if they want to experience that, then we think it’s great fun that they get involved, you know? Somehow it’s always such a joy to share what is great about your own life [...] But it’s also that it’s different when people from the outside see those things, right? They experience it differently and they, like, confirm for us, like, ”it’s amazing, look at the things happening around here”. And we’re like, well, yes, even though we’re like “it’s the same that happens year after year”, you know? But somehow, you get so incredible happy about the life you have, because those people come in and put that into words. I’ve experienced that several times and that’s really, really great”*

The motivations of the host quoted above seem to encompass a certain proudness and joy of sharing the rural experience. This aligns with the findings of Weaver and Fennell (1997), according to which the sharing of the rural experience with outsiders is a key reason why farmers engage in tourism. Furthermore, the host in the quote above seems to be motivated by the opportunity to teach outsiders about everyday farm life; a finding that aligns with that of Nickerson et al, 2001. However, compared to extant knowledge that only identifies these motivations, our study adds new knowledge as it also accounts for the benefits that the host gains from sharing the farm experiences with the tourists. What is interesting is that the hosts engage in these interactions and knowledge sharing encounters, not only to communicate *to* the tourists, but especially they do so in order to engage in interactions that both make them see their own life ‘with new eyes’ and enable them to re-construct and re-enforce their enactment of their lives as enjoyable and privileged. These non-monetary benefits for hosts are currently under-researched. Nonetheless, they seem to set farm tourism enterprises aside from traditional theory.

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**Discussion and conclusion**

Although several researchers have studied family farms (Gassen & Errington, 1993; Marsden, 1984; Ollenburg & Buckley, 2007), studies of the more social motivations of farmers as well as studies of host-guest interactions are sparse. As indicated by the interviewees, who participated in our study, these social motivations and mutual benefits obtained through host-guest interactions are, nonetheless, of great importance to the guests, thus suggesting that if we wish to better understand ‘farm tourism’ and particularly the supply-side of this kind of tourism, more in-depth studies of hosts are needed. In particular, our study suggests that it is problematic to treat farm tourism enterprises as if they have much in common with both larger corporations and other types of SMTEs. Farm tourism enterprises seem to differ significantly from other enterprises and especially so, when it comes to motivations and benefits for the hosts. The hosts in our study are not in the farm tourism businesses because it is particularly profitable. On the contrary, our study corroborates previous studies that suggest that the economic success of farm tourism is minimal (Busby & Rendle, 2000; Weaver & Fennell, 1997). Our study, however, also corroborates previous findings pertaining to the fact that more socially based motivations (such as the sharing of the rural experience with outsiders, to inform about the conditions for contemporary agriculture and to socialize and meet new people) are important in farm tourism (e.g. Getz & Carlsen, 2000; McGehhe & Kim, 2004; Weaver & Fennell, 1997). Although micro tourism businesses may have little in common with larger corporations, academia (with the exception of entrepreneurship theory) tends to treat such enterprises as if they resemble larger counterparts to such an extent that it makes sense to use the same theoretical frameworks as we do when we study other firms. However, drawing on an investigation of one specific type of small tourism enterprises (i.e. farm tourism) this paper suggests that these small enterprises differ from other enterprises in relation to a series of issues other than merely size; thus suggesting that if we wish to understand these enterprises we need to develop theories that specifically deal with the characteristics and challenges of these enterprises. Furthermore, albeit entrepreneurship theory may contribute to a better understanding of farm tourism enterprises, a series of unique characteristics of these enterprises (e.g. interpersonal motives, farming as the primary business and blurriness of boundaries between private and commercial hospitality) indicate that these enterprises differ substantially from other entrepreneurial ventures. Finally, whereas this paper has emphasized the family farms and their offerings, the paper does not include discussion of larger farm tourism enterprises. The empirical study does, albeit highly tentatively, point towards larger farm enterprises having far more in common with commercial hospitality enterprises such as hotels and hostels than with small and micro-sized farm tourism businesses. For example, it seems that in larger farm tourism enterprises host/guest interactions to a far greater extent align with service encounters as described in the welter of texts that focus on service encounters in traditional commercial hospitality settings. As a result, differences between larger and

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smaller farm tourism enterprises seem to be a topic that should be uncovered further in future studies.

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